

CHAPTER 223

December 24, 2011

“Oh hey Chie... uh... Isn’t it a little late to be going for a walk?”

Time had passed since Adachi’s conviction, and before Justin even knew it, December was coming to a close. It was almost Christmas time in fact, which for some reason he just didn’t care about this year. Maybe it was because he actually had to get people gifts this year, maybe it was because with everything that had happened he wasn’t really in a Christmas mood. Had Chie not reminded him that today was in fact Christmas Eve, he probably would have completely forgotten about it. You know, despite having his heart crushed earlier that month, Justin felt strangely at ease in the cold winter weather. Maybe it was just because he was excited about the day off tomorrow, hell, he only had half day of school today. He had actually already changed into his sweatpants and t-shirt because he was feeling particularly lazy today. Chie smiled warmly at Justin as she stood there in the door frame... Or at least, as warmly as she could in that chilly weather. You know it was cold because there was still some snow on the ground; up to the ankle if one were to dig their foot right through to the ground. Chie had no intention of wading through the snow though, so that wasn’t a problem. She was only happy Justin’s house had a roofed porch; made the wooden steps to his house so dry.

“Well its Christmas Eve, so I figured I’d stop by for a little bit.” Chie grinned. Justin rubbed at the back of his neck a bit. He didn’t really catch on that Christmas Eve was considered a romantic holiday, but he did understand it was a big day all the same. And its not like she’d have much opportunity to hang around with Justin on Christmas Day. That is, unless her father had a sudden revelation and invited Justin over for Christmas dinner. Hell Justin would settle for awkward tension if it meant having a proper meal tomorrow. As it stood, his Christmas dinner was leftover pizza from yesterday. It was a wonder there was even any pizza left with the way Maya ate. It was nice to see her eating after all that had gone down with her throwing up and everything. Her appetite had been pretty much non-existent for so long, so it was good that her stomach was starting to expand again. Just not so nice on Justin’s wallet. And speaking of Maya, Chie peered her head through the door frame, just beneath Justin’s arm as if he wouldn’t just move out of the way if she asked, searching for Maya. Strangely, she wasn’t home, despite it being at least nineish or so at night. It wasn’t dark enough that it was hard to see, but it was dark all the same. She would think Maya would be here. “Huh? Where’s Maya?”

“At Yosuke’s.” Justin shrugged before moving out of the way to allow Chie in. It was very cold out after all, and he didn’t want her catching a chill. She smiled, though that eventually gave way to confusion as she made her way inside, taking her jacket off as Justin closed the door behind her. She was wearing that white top Justin

had seen too many times before, a striped shirt just beneath it. He had to wonder if it was a little cold to be wearing that, but then, Chie always was resistant to the cold... in more ways than one.

“Yosuke’s?” She questioned. Now while Justin didn’t get that Christmas Eve was usually a romantic holiday for couples, she certainly did, and there was still that suspicion in the air that Yosuke totally had a thing for Maya. They were still trying to figure out who Maya had a thing for, but given that she went to Yosuke’s house of her own volition, it was entirely possible it was Yosuke. But she wouldn’t jump to conclusions. “What’s she doing there?”

“Resigning.” Justin remarked rather bluntly. Seemed today was going to be one of those one word answers kind of days. In truth, Justin just had a sore throat and needed something too cool his throat down. He made his way to the fridge and pulled out a bottle of cola, taking a sip of the bubbling beverage. Usually flat soda was good for you when you were sick after all, and while Justin wasn’t claiming to be sick by any means, he imagined this would work for a bad throat as well. Chie was simply baffled; she couldn’t believe Maya was quitting her job. I mean, why? Did she find a better job or something? Did Justin come into a lot of money recently that made her needing to work obsolete? Of course, she never NEEDED to work; it just helped them make sure they had enough money to get by. They’d get along just fine even if she wasn’t working.

“Resigning!? B-But why?”

“Oh now see that would be ruining the surprise.” Justin chuckled slightly. He didn’t like to lie to Chie, but there were two things he knew about the predicament he found himself in now. One, Chie was a blabbermouth when it came to secrets; she was not exactly trustworthy with this information. The second was that Maya and Justin agreed this should be a surprise to everyone, save Yosuke, who would need to help with translations and who also needed to know Maya would be leaving her job at Junes. “Don’t worry, she’s got something else she’ll be doing.” Chie shook her head and sighed. Oh how Justin loved these little games of his. She’d be lying if part of her said she didn’t enjoy playing them. A small grin crept across her lips. Justin had made his way to the couch where he simply sat back and lifted his eyes to the ceiling. He had been listening to Yoshimi Battles the Pink Robots, but I guess Chie just wanted his attention or something because she eventually pounced towards the couch and grabbed him in a headlock just next to him on the couch. “Ga- Choking-Too tight-“

“Oh, sorry.” Chie chuckled slightly, cheeks lighting up red as she let go of Justin’s neck. She just kind of meant to goof around, she didn’t think she was actually hurting Justin by putting him in a headlock like that. Justin didn’t hold it against her though. He just rubbed at his now sore throat again. Chie, everything that was good and bad all wrapped up in one beautiful package. How painful love could be

sometimes. “I’m just a little nervous, I’ve never spent Christmas Eve with someone like this before.” She admitted with embarrassment. Justin raised his eyebrow with curiosity. He had just assumed she wanted to hang out for a bit, he didn’t think it was going to be like that. Not that he was objecting, he just wished she would have dropped him a line or something. He would have bought a bunch of candles or something in an attempt at creating the cheesiest romantic evening ever. “Though I’m also amazed. Here I am, spending Christmas with you, and I didn’t even know you last year.”

“It is something, isn’t it? To be quite honest... I never really imagined being here right now with... well... anyone. But for what it’s worth, I’m glad it was with you.” Justin laughed a bit. Now that Chie mentioned it, it was kind of an amazing feat. They had both gone from being complete strangers to sitting here together on the couch on a crisp winter night. Justin was only happy Maya was out of the house for the moment being. No doubt she’d be back soon to ruin the atmosphere though. You would think that just sitting there bobbing their heads in time to music wouldn’t exactly be so romantic, but I guess there are exceptions to every rule. Let’s just be happy Justin hadn’t decided to listen to heavy metal today.

Her name is Yoshimi

She's a black belt in karate

Working for the city

She has to discipline her body

'Cause she knows that it's demanding

To defeat those evil machines

I know she can beat them

Oh Yoshimi, they don't believe me

But you won't let those robots defeat me

Yeah, see what I mean? Was kind of a luck of the draw thing, but Justin could work with it. It was pretty much quiet between the two, just enjoying sitting there with their shoulders touching. It was only a minute or two before Chie rested her head against Justin’s shoulder, and Justin in turn leaned his head against hers. “So how come you never fought any giant pink robots?” Justin questioned sarcastically.

“What, the eyeball thing didn’t count?” She responded with curiosity. Ah, a very valid point, only that it wasn’t pink. Close enough, Justin would give her the benefit of the doubt that she could overcome the power of the color pink. He simply laughed again, softly, but certainly amused by all this. It was the smart ass remarks that just reminded him why he loved her so much; because she had personality. Not

a care in the world, truly, but more importantly, she was just fun to be around. And... well... she was a good person. That didn't have much to do with the sarcasm aspect, but the fact of the matter was Chie was always there for him. No one had ever believed in him the way she believed in him.

"I love you, Chie." He whispered to her before planting a peck on the side of her head. She responded in kind by blushing as hard as her cheeks would allow. It was always so embarrassing when he did this to her, and yet it just made her feel so... happy. It was hard to explain. Was this what love was supposed to be like, or was she missing something? They just kind of sat there for a long while, the heat from each other's bodies keeping them warm.

"You know, uh... I told my parents I was going to spend the night at Yukiko's." Chie spoke up after a brief moment, almost choking on her words. How did she phrase this correctly... She had to be subtle. But then she should have realized subtlety only went so far with Justin. He didn't get it most of the time. "My parents won't get worried if they think I'm with Yukiko. We used to have sleepovers together all the time... So, uh... You know what I'm trying to say, right?" Justin stared at Chie with a blank expression on his face before raising his eyebrow with confusion.

"No not really." Justin shook his head. Oh how subtlety fell on deaf ears in regards to the blonde haired boy. She sighed and rubbed her forehead with the tip of her index finger and her thumb. Why did he have to make everything so hard sometimes.

"I mean I lied to them about going to Yukiko's." Chie repeated, so Justin didn't seem to quite get that she wasn't telling the truth about going over to Yukiko's house. He made an 'ah' sound. That explanation did wonders for a man such as him that couldn't pick up on the subtle motions of one's body language, or their tone of voice.

"And of course that means they don't expect you home..." Justin muttered to himself, as if he needed to speak out loud to really put two and two together. "So... what, you want to sleep over?" Chie rubbed at the back of her head a bit with embarrassment. She really wished Justin would just say yes or no. It was embarrassing having Justin feedback a request to her like that, as if he could scarcely believe it himself. It wouldn't be the first time she slept over of course, so it didn't catch Justin off by too much guard. He was only surprised he wanted to stay somewhere else Christmas Eve. Christmas was sort of a family thing, right? Wouldn't she rather wake up at home to open presents and shit? "Yeah, I don't see why not, but uh... You don't happen to have a sleeping bag with you, do you?" Justin remarked. She hadn't come in with anything, which was strange because you would think her parents would force her to bring some clothes to change into and shit. Unless Yukiko just sort of had that stuff lying around. It wouldn't surprise Justin given how often Chie slept over there.

"Oh, I uh... No." Chie sighed. She could already see where this was going. There were only two spots she could sleep; the bed or the couch. Of course the couch was sort of where Maya slept, and while she was out right now, she would no doubt be back soon. I mean... It was a big bed, but uh... you know... That might be a little awkward. In truth, neither secretly minded the possibility; but they'd never admit it, not to mention they feared what the other would think about it. Justin ran his hand down his face as he thought on the matter. There had to be something else they could do for bedding. Justin didn't want to have to split the bed unless it was their last choice. As he paced around and thought to himself on the matter though it became fairly clear that might not be an issue anymore. The room had since started to get dark from the moonlight being eclipsed, and when Justin looked out the window to examine the cause, it had seemed it had started snowing. Hard. It was hard to see out the window kind of hard.

"Holy crap." Justin remarked with surprise as he stared at the snow dancing in the wind. This snowstorm wasn't supposed to come until later, not to mention it was fucking enormous. Justin was simply glad Chie showed up when she did, otherwise she'd be wandering around outside during some pretty dangerous conditions. That did bring up the concern that Maya was outside, though. Justin could only hope Maya was still at his place; which would actually solve two problems. The problem of Maya being outside in hazardous conditions such as this, and the problem of Justin's couch being occupied. He swiftly dug his hand through his pocket as he yanked out his phone. He only hoped that he could still get reception in this weather.

"Mhmm... Yeah, no problem."

Yosuke clicked his phone shut taking a deep breath as he slipped the device back into his pants pocket. He agreed that Maya shouldn't be walking home in this storm, and he certainly enjoyed her company, but he had to question just how long this would last exactly. From what he had heard from the weather channel earlier today, it was supposed to be a pretty big storm... But it was supposed to hit tomorrow, not today. It made you wonder whether or not this was the same storm or not. All Yosuke knew was he was running out of places for people to sleep, and at this hour with this weather, it seemed he was going to have to find more places. He shook his head before making his way back to his room, where Teddie was enthusiastically anticipating what fun there would be once the snow settled. Seemed he wanted to get Maya to build a snowman with him, but she just wasn't feeling up to it. Funny, after the letter she had gotten in the mail, she should be celebrating, but instead she just felt like crap. "Hey, something wrong?"

She looked up from the floorboards beneath her, still vibrating from Teddie jumping up and down. Oh there was plenty wrong, but Maya didn't want to trouble Yosuke

with it. It was bad enough she quit the job he had given her mere moments ago. *"It's... nothing."* She fibbed. Her hand motions said one thing, but her eyes said something else. Yosuke shook his head with mild amusement and significant concern. Honestly, what was he going to do with this girl some of these days? He soon found a seat beside her on his bedroom floor, crossing his legs to match hers.

"Come on, you can tell me."

"Ooh, ooh, I know!" Teddie shouted interrupting Yosuke's attempts to break through to Maya. He didn't seem to quite get there were certain times to shout and and speak, and times where he could just let others speak on their own behalf. "I bet Maya-chan did something bad so she's not on Sandy Claws' list this year!" Maya and Yosuke simply glared at the over enthusiastic bear. Right, Maya on the naughty list. Good joke.

"It's Santa Clause." Yosuke corrected with a slight grimace and deep breath, trying to quell the migraine Teddie was giving him by manipulating his flow of oxygen. "And will you sit down and shut up. I swear sometimes it would be better off if you want back to the TV." Yosuke rolled his eyes. He didn't mean it, and Teddie knew that; it was simply a means of ventilating his annoyance with all this. "As I was saying...! You know you can talk to me. You and Justin fighting again?"

"No, it's just..." Maya paused for a moment: It was true Justin and here had fought recently, but that wasn't what had been on her mind. No, it was Christmas time again, and that's what gripped at her very heart. She used to love Christmas with the family too, at least until they funded the holiday with blood money... *"I miss home... Mom and Cliff, and... And Dad..."* Her motions became slower and shakier, and soon her eyes began to water with tears. Yosuke was quick to jump on the case and try to wipe her tears away.

"H-hey hey. Don't cry. I-I'm sure they're still celebrating with you in spirit..." Yosuke tried to calm her down, though it did nothing more than cause her heart to cry even deeper tears of blood. Yosuke just didn't get it; she always missed her dad... It was just that Christmas time tended to remind her of this stuff because it was around the time they pulled the plug on her father.

"You just don't get it..." She countered in pain, pushing herself up from the floor before storming out of the room and towards the bathroom. She needed a moment to try and recompose herself and to clear the tears from her eyes. Yosuke tried to stop her, but in the end he realized she just needed a moment to regain her composure. Still, it hurt to see her like that.

"Maya..." He muttered to himself, folding his arms with disappointment in himself for screwing the pooch on this one. He wanted to help her, but in the end, he simply made it worse. He should have realized at the end of the day, nothing short of going back home would make a difference in her morale. And it's not like he could afford

plane tickets, not to mention Justin would probably kill him... Unless... That's right, Maya never took a plane here or anything like that; she just went into a television on her side and came out through one on Inaba's side... Could it then be used the opposite way? "Teddie, do you think you could set up the television to San Diego?"

"Huh? Well of course I can!"

"Perfect, you do that and I'll go get Maya."

"I can't believe this... This is..."

Maya stared out into the world around her, snow floating down onto the streets she pressed her feet against as she marched forth, a sense of fulfillment washing over her as she walked along the lands of her youth. This was San Diego. She hadn't seen it in so long; not since she ran off to Los Angeles... She simply could not believe it that she was here again. She had vowed to never show her face here again; hell it was a risky move with a warrant out there for her. She was a suspect in a murder case after all, and the perpetrator at that. And yet she had never felt so happy to be here once again. Teddie and Yosuke were amazed too by this new country. The television they made their way out of was located in a dump on the outskirts of town, and yet despite this place being far removed from the city, Teddie and Yosuke still were under a slight bit of culture shock. It was hard to explain; the atmosphere was just so... different.

"You said you wanted to go home, right?" Yosuke smiled as he made his way to Maya's side. "If I know anything about time zones, it's still the morning here. We can go anywhere you want." He encouraged her. After all, most businesses should be open around his time, so it probably wasn't much of a problem as far as activities or patronage. Some foreign shopping might be fun, though unfortunately you'd be hard pressed to find anyone in this city willing to take yen. Maya paused, simply admiring the country she was born in. Oh it was good to be back alright, but as far as what to do while they were here, she hadn't a clue. She pressed her index finger against her chin as she contemplated the matter.

"Well... There is ONE place."

"Got any fives?"

Justin and Chie had been sitting on the couch and enjoying the only card game they both knew how to play without any reason of a doubt. Beside war, but honest to god, fuck how long that game took to play. Chie shook her head, much to Justin's annoyance. It seemed like no matter how many times he asked, she never had a

damned five. This had been going on for ages now; and it was the ONLY card he still needed to get rid of.

"So... Uh, don't kill me for asking, but..." Chie spoke up as Justin stuck his hand onto the deck to grab another card. There was something she wanted to ask Justin, but she knew it was kind of a sensitive topic, so she was hesitant to even bring it up. That said though, she felt it was still something that needed to be watched carefully given the circumstances. "Have you been alright with... you know... I know you were pretty bummed about Adachi..."

"Oh... We're talking about that?" Justin remarked with great disappointment. They were supposed to be having fun at a sleepover right now dammit, not talking about how his heart had been twisted and sliced to pieces by a mad-man disguised as his friend. And to answer that question, no. The pain would always linger; he just locked it away as best he could so as to appear like he didn't care at all. One day, it was all going to hit him again, and he'd breakdown from all he repressed over the years. But for now, he was content pretending it never happened. "No, why would I be okay with that? He was like a father to me and he-... You know what? I don't want to talk about this. I'll be fine." Justin shook his head.

"Are you sure? You know we can talk about it."

"I know we can, but I don't want to." Justin countered in his usually snarky tone. Chie simply shook her head with disappointment. What was she going to do with this kid some of these days. It was like he was purposely trying to make himself sick by bottling all this up. Clearly he didn't remember what happened at the riverbed that one time. "Hey... When you said you lied about going to Yukiko's... Uh... What exactly would happen if I said 'no' to you at the door?" Justin raised his eyebrow with curiosity. Seemed like she kinda HAD to be here based on a situation she had crafted herself. Chie paused for a moment staring at her cards as her eyes widened. Within seconds she jumped up, knocking all the cards over in the process.

"Crap! I forgot to call Yukiko!"

"So uh... Can I just say I won this match?"

"Hi Dad... It's me, Maya..."

So when Yosuke told Maya they could go anywhere in town, he hadn't quite expected to be brought to a graveyard. He probably should have seen it coming to be honest. That said, they really should have either Teddie somewhere along the line, because he was proving to be a real pain in the ass with the way he was running about the cemetery. Maya needed a moment here, and here Teddie was going nuts. Yosuke and Maya stood there, looking down at the grave in front of them. Yosuke never knew Maya's father, but from the stories she told, he could tell

he must have been a great man. The least Yosuke could do was pay his respects. And Maya? She didn't gesture a single word; simply flapping her gums as if she could still speak. The dead have no ears after all, and no one else was worth talking to now that it was just her and him again, so it mattered not whether she had a voice or not.

"It's been a while. I'm sorry I haven't visited... I got myself into a lot of trouble... But I guess you already know that..." She shook her head, eyes cast down with disappointment. If her father was alive to see what she had done... She wouldn't be his daughter anymore. She wouldn't be worthy of the title no doubt. *"You must be ashamed of me... I would be..."* She paused for a moment, taking a deep breath and flicking tear droplets from her eyelashes. *"Um... I don't really know about Mom or Cliff, we don't exactly talk anymore... Justin and me still talk though. I know you never got to meet him in person, but you would have liked him."* She cracked a small smile and raised her eyes to the sky. *"God with as much as I've talked about him here, you probably know him better than me."* She giggled slightly. Back when she had a rather big crush on Justin, she would come here to talk to her father about him, and how nice he always was towards her, how she was always convinced he was doing something because he liked her. He couldn't hear here now of course, but she'd like to believe he was somewhere up there in the heavens listening and smiling down on her.

"Looks like someone else visited recently." Yosuke interrupted as something caught his eyes. Usually when people left something along the graves, they left flowers or other plants... He had never quite seen someone leave behind an entire book. He reached out to touch the book, though Maya was quick to slap his hand away. That wasn't his; he had no right taking that. "Ow, sorry!" Yosuke shouted, rubbing his hand a bit with pain. Somehow, he got the feeling Maya had left that there a long time ago. It was only a wonder the rain hadn't destroyed a flimsy paperback like that yet.

"...I left that here before I left San Diego..." Maya explained after a moment, a sad look in her eyes. *"First Edition copy of Watchmen... My father was a big fan of comic books; he used to read me Spider-Man and all that stuff when I was little. But there was always this one book he wouldn't let me touch... I was always mad that he wouldn't read it to me. After all, it had a big smiley face on it, how bad could it be? I didn't get to read it until he passed away... I took it everywhere with me, just... Reading it over and over again. The book itself was good, but really, it just reminded me of Dad... When I left here... I decided to leave it with him. I didn't deserve it, and besides... It must get boring in Heaven, so I figured now he'd have something to do..."* Maya sighed. She could have easily pawned it off for a huge profit. After all, it was a first edition. But in the end... Her father was not for sale.

"Oh, I see..." Yosuke muttered, averting his gaze to look at the ground to his side. It was hard to look at her when she was grieving as much as she was. Besides, Yosuke

wasn't exactly a master of words... he really didn't know what to say to her as she poured her heart and soul out and front of him. "I-I'm sure wherever your father is, he really appreciates it." Maya paused for a moment, staring at the engraving along the face of her father's grave stone. It felt like every time she read the name over again, it hurt more and more. To see him reduced to nothing more than a name when he had been so much more in life was the greatest insult of all. An insult to all the dead. It couldn't be helped, but it still hurt all the same.

"Do you think so?" Maya turned to Yosuke after a moment, deciding she was going to be sick to her stomach if she stared at the gravestone any longer than she already had. It was a question she'd like to think she knew the answer to, but in truth she just couldn't think straight anymore. Memories could only answer so many questions after all. What Maya's father was doing in the afterlife right now, she could not judge. She'd hope he was looking down and smiling, but after the things she had done, he just might have abandoned her. Maybe losing her voice was a punishment for the sins she had committed in that damn apartment building so long ago. Her father's way of showcasing his disapproval in the skies above. Yosuke nodded, though it turned out he wouldn't be the only one to answer that question.

"I'm positive he is. He would be very proud of you, child." Maya jumped almost immediately, a smile of pleasant surprise crossing her face. Now that was a voice she hadn't heard in so long. She was almost convinced she would never hear it again. Yosuke was only confused who the man with the long hair approaching her was. Maya certainly seemed to know though given that she ran up to the bastard and give him a hug almost immediately. It would have been a handshake had they not seen each other in so long, but I guess the emotional suspense was too high as of late. The tall man with the long pony tail and the face of a teenager barely reacted, simply smiling at Maya as she let go.

"Oh my god it's so good to see you again!" Maya signed off, perhaps forgetting that no one she used to know knew about the loss of her voice. Yosuke was prepared to translate if needed, though for the moment being, Maya seemed much too eager and excited for him to really get out a word edge wise in that conversation. *"Oh Yosuke, this is Phillip Eamon; he used to be my therapist before I left for Inaba. I just call him Dr. Phil though."* Maya joked slightly. She always did like to tease this guy about his inconvenient choice of name in the medical business; and thankfully, he never took offense. He had a good sense of humor in regards to that kind of stuff. Which was nice.

"Oh, uh... Hey." Yosuke stuttered slightly before extending his hand to meet Phillips. They shook hands, though Yosuke couldn't help but feel a little awkward. It had to be the pony tail; guys should not have hair THAT fucking long. It was like... down past his ass. It gave him the jeebies. "She says it's good to s-"

"I'm aware." He cut Yosuke off. He was fluent in a lot of languages, sign-language being one of them. He could read what she was saying no problem. And no, he didn't seem too surprised to see the girl that could speak to him just the year prior speaking through her hands and not her lips. He was rather informed about this kind of stuff in fact, even if they didn't know it. He wouldn't be a very good doctor if he didn't keep an eye on his patients after all. "Paying your respects to your father?"

"...Yes." Maya sighed, pointing her eyes to the ground again. Dammit, there was something about the phrase 'paying your respects' that just reminded her how far gone her father really was. Even in death she could at least come here and talk to the stone above his coffin had try to trick herself to believe he was answering back... Paying your respects? Seemed pretty definitively dead. She looked like she was going to start crying again at any second, though she was interrupted by the sensation of Phillip placing his hand along her shoulder, a smile on his face.

"Chin up." He encouraged her. "Believe me when I say your father would be proud to see the woman you are becoming. And never feel as though he would look down on you for what you have done. Good things come to those that suffer in the name of justice." He continued. Maya had told him all about the incident a long time ago in fact. She probably shouldn't have, but Phillip was just one of those kinds of guys you could trust with even your darkest of secrets. Like he didn't care who you were or what you had done. In fact, he was a very spiritual man; like the kind that was more concerned with fate than on the past. Maya smiled slightly. She didn't believe him, but it was nice to have the vote of confidence.

"...*What brings you here anyway?*" Maya questioned after a moment. Surely he wasn't just walking around the cemetery for no reason, right? He bowed his head as he turned to face towards the tomb stone.

"It's Christmas Eve. I knew you'd be here." He replied. She hadn't come last year of course, but generally it had become a tradition for her to visit during the Christmas year. Why Phillip knew that, she didn't question, all she knew is it was admittedly kinda weird. "Everyone has their roles to play in the grand scheme of life; it's all very predictable once you've quarantined a repetition in pattern." He continued, as if trying to justify the creepiness of him knowing Maya's schedule. All that was clear was he had come here to speak to Maya, though as to why, neither knew quite yet.

"...*So uh... did you... need me for something?*"

"For any express purpose? No, I don't suppose I do." Phillip shook his head before turning his eyes back down to Maya. He was nothing more than a guide to the sheep that sought the way. It was his job only to see that Maya didn't sway too far from the path she was destined to follow... In that regard she was doing fairly well. She had overcome a great many trials, and while even today she suffered the consequences of her role, it was true that the gods found favor in those who

martyred themselves for the good of others. "All I can say is that the road ahead will be full of hardships. Just remember always what I taught you."

"...Hope overcomes all." Maya remarked with suspicion. She wasn't quite sure what Phillip meant by the road ahead being tough, especially not with things going as well as they were now. After solving a murder case that threatened to destroy all of Inaba, she thought things were pretty damn good by comparison. Could anything be considered a hardship after what she had already fought?

"Precisely." He smiled, pleased to see she could still remember. "So long as you have hope, no evil shall be able to overcome your power. Hope shall be your light through the darkness guiding you in life." He explained to her rather gleefully. Maya had heard all of this before mind you, this was just repetition. But repetition did insure the message was seered into her brain. Hope was the greatest weapon she could ever have; never let go of it. As if she was in any position to let go of hope after the role she had been selected to fill... But then, sheep had been swayed off their pathway before. "I suppose there's not much more for me to say. Just remember those words, and keep moving ahead when life tries to hold you back... And with that, I suppose I'll leave you and your boyfriend here be." Phillip remarked, holding his hands behind his back as he turned his attention over to Yosuke. Maya and Yosuke were pretty quick to turn beat red with embarrassment.

"H-Huh!? I-It's not like that, we're just friends!" Yosuke stammered nervously. Maya was doing quite a bit to try and convince Phillip the same, though it truly wasn't working. He simply smiled and nodded his head a bit. His 'mistake' then. It probably didn't help that Teddie had finally gotten bored of the gravestones and decided to take a piss take on the two.

"Yosuke and Maya, sitting in a tre-" He was cut off almost immediately by Maya kicking him straight in the face. She had just about enough of his crap today without him reinforcing the idea the two were a couple. It would be nice, but it wasn't true.

"He's a rather interesting fellow." Phillip remarked as he stared at Teddie, now in pain on the ground. It was rare to find wolves marching along with sheep in perfect harmony after all. "Well all the same, this is where I take my leave. I shall watch over you in spirit wherever you go, my child. Goodbye." He dismissed himself before slowly marching his way through the stones of the cemetery, disappearing in the horizon. Yosuke simply sighed, a shiver down his spine. Right, that guy was super creepy without him dropping crap like Maya and him being a thing like that. He nearly had a heart attack.

"Where do you even find these people?" Yosuke questioned with great confusion.

"You'd be surprised the kind of people you can meet at a McDonalds."

Go on and wring my neck

Like when a rag gets wet

A little discipline

For my pet genius

My head is like lettuce

Go on dig your thumbs in

I cannot stop giving

I'm thirty-something

Justin and Chie, meanwhile, were at his house, where they were enjoying a rousing game of Rock Band. They made for the perfect vocal duo in that Justin could hit all those growl notes, and Chie can hit everything else. She found that she simply couldn't play the plastic bass at all; it was just too different from how you played the real thing. If Justin had been asked to buy the pro bass that came with the game, he'd give that to her, but as it stood, he only had the pro-guitar. On the other hand, the microphone worked the same way as singing in real life, so she could definitely do that. She was okay with singing around Justin, if only because she knew by comparison she was better than him by a long shot. In that way, this had quickly turned into karaoke night, with Justin backing up with guitar.

"When are we gonna pick a song I actually know." Chie remarked with slight annoyance, though I think Justin was more offended by Chie's lack of Faith No More knowledge. There was one thing that you should know about Justin, and that was he was intolerant to any musical tastes other than his own. So not liking something he liked was a sure way to get slapped upside the head when it came to music.

"The only song you've recognized so far is Living in America. I don't even know where you HEARD that." Justin rolled his eyes a bit. Not even the 80's pop. You know when, he found out this was a girl who liked System of a Down and the Black Keys, he had suspected she'd have better musical tastes, but alas it seemed like that was about the extent of their common taste in music. Minus maybe Weezer; but everyone in the Investigation Team seemed to like them so that wasn't exactly something special between the two.

"Well then let's go back to-" Chie was going to object to anymore of this 80's metal that she just couldn't relate to when the lights started to flicker. Soon with the lights went the television and the game console, leaving Chie and Justin in the pitch black. The storm was so bad that it must have knocked over a telephone pole or something. Whatever happened, the power was clearly out, and at this hour, it was

far too dark to see without something to light the way. "...that. Well then, so much for that."

"Crap, I knew I should have gotten some candles. Help me find my lighter so we can see." Justin sighed as he started waving his arms about as he tried to navigate the house using only the walls and the furniture to navigate around the room. Chie in turn did the same, though she wasn't so sure how much use she'd be if she found the lighter. She didn't know how to work one of those. She imagined it would be as easy as flipping it open, but as an ex-smoker Justin could attest to that not being true at all. Plus it wasn't a very good lighter, it got jammed all the fucking time. Still, she supposed she could use her voice to help Justin navigate to her if she came across it. And with that the two wandered around for a good while trying to find the damn thing.

"Hey hands off pal!"

"Sorry!" Then there were moments like this where they just so happened to have a rather unfortunate collision in search of the lost artifact. Look, it was bound to happen eventually with Justin waving his arms all over the place for furniture to use as a way point. Chie shouldn't have been such a damn convincing lamp. The two fumbled around for quite a while, bumping into each other on several occasions before Justin finally found something that resembled a lighter. It was Maya's, but he'd take it. He was only surprised Maya hadn't taken it with her. She probably figured she'd be back in time for a smoke. Poor girl, probably already twitching from the urge to smoke. "Think I got something here."

All the same, Justin was frantic to find some light so they could move around without accidentally rapping up a criminal record for pedophilia. He was sure to make sure the lighter would be facing up before placing his thumb along the top of the lighter and flicking the flame to life. Now, when Justin had flicked that thing open, he hadn't expected Chie to be right on top of him, nor she him. She figured he was further away than he actually was. She wasn't so close that the flame hit her skin or anything, but close enough that the fire only seemed to illuminate her face. Her brown eyes sparkled like the sea as the fire danced in her eyes. Justin's heart skipped a slight beat. Under this lighting she was... absolutely breath taking. She was always beautiful, but this was really something. Maybe those candles wouldn't have been such a bad investment. "Chie...? H-Have I ever told you you have beautiful eyes?"

Chie didn't even respond, she was just as lost in the fire dancing in Justin's eyes as he was hers. Plus he was blushing, even the orange light of the flame couldn't hide that. She was too, admittedly, but she didn't exactly find herself quite as cute when she did it as Justin. What was there to blush about she had to wonder? And yet... she didn't actually care for once. She was mere inches away from Justin, her body practically touching his when she leaned past the fire to plant her lips against his.

She wasn't sure what was getting into her, but she liked it. The two kissed for a moment, slowly backing into a nearby wall. By the time that Justin's back hit the wall, by the time there was nowhere left to go, their lips parted ways for only a brief moment. "I love you too."

Justin smiled at her for a moment, her arms snaked around his waist in an almost pleasurable way. He leaned in once more, for what would appear to be a peck at first, but in fact had just been him blowing out the flame that shone through the night; leaving them all alone in the dark with nothing but body heat to go by.

And what happens in the dark, stays in the dark.

"It's strange adapting to time zones..."

Yosuke, Maya, and Teddie were walking down the street, coffees in hand as they walked the street. They were making their way back home now after what felt like only a couple hours at most. And yet despite that fact, they were completely and utterly exhausted. Still, they didn't do much, which disappointed Yosuke slightly. I mean, there was only so much they COULD do with yen in their pockets, but I guess Maya knew more than a handful of shady people who would take said yen and get you what you need. Their services mostly applied to illegal immigrants, but it also worked in situations such as this. Didn't mean Maya wasn't going to pay triple what she should for a cup of coffee though. She was just happy to have something to keep her awake though. Yosuke had suggested the possibility of going... you know... home home, but Maya very vocally refused. Half the reason she ran away from home was so that her mother and brother wouldn't have to deal with her. Besides, did Yosuke honestly think she was going to leave that house if she came knocking now? Her mother would padlock her in her room for fuck's sake. Part of her wanted to go see her mother (and not her brother because he was kind of a huge asshole) again, but she had to resist her temptations for what she felt was right deep down in her heart.

"Took me a couple of days in Inaba to adapt." Maya countered as they made their way back to the television in the junkyard. It was only starting to get bright here in San Diego, but in Inaba, it was no doubt pitch black. They were probably going to finish their coffee and go right to bed after this to be quite honest. Though Yosuke did have to figure out sleeping arrangements. He figured he'd just suck it up and let Teddie in his bed and let Maya have the futon. God knows Teddie couldn't be trusted to share a bed with a girl. God knows HE couldn't be trusted.

"You sure you don't want to do anything else? W-We can go shopping or something you know." Yosuke continued to question her. It felt like this should have been such a big thing for her, and yet she just didn't care. All she did was go see her father and do some sight-seeing of the place she used to live. Hell... She even stopped by

Justin's house to see if it changed since she had last visited. It was a mess, broken windows and everything, and a for sale sign up front that no passerby would ever consider contemplating the price of. Whoever got the deed to the house in Justin's father's will fucked up big time, though it was hard to say whether he himself had done the damage or whether it was looters. In the end, it was just sad seeing the house fall apart like that. Other than that though, truth be told, it was just so much for Maya to take in at once. The only last place she wanted to see was... that place. Curiosity was questioning what had happened to that old apartment building since it burned to the ground. Was it still considered a crime scene. She didn't know. And she knew better than to go looking. She'd have to live with not knowing what had happened in her criminal case, because otherwise she'd have to live with jail bars.

"This has already been more than I could ever ask for." Maya grinned. It wasn't much Yosuke had done, simply getting Teddie to open up the other access point to San Diego, but it was just... the nicest thing. She said she missed home, and Yosuke went out of his way to bring her there. It couldn't have been more perfect if he tried. And yet, she was just so confused. Why DID Yosuke always act so nice to her? Because they were friends? It had to be that, right? She wished it was more than that, but... She didn't even know anymore. It was hard to tell what was going through that boy's mind. For now, she was merely content with what he had done for her. Yosuke sighed and shrugged his shoulders before waving his hands towards the television, allowing her to step through first. She smiled before taking a precarious step, followed by Yosuke. Teddie was already back in Yosuke's room of course. He wasn't stupid, he knew what was going to go down with sleeping arrangements. Fuck that; he wasn't sleeping with Yosuke, and there was only room enough for one on that futon. Needless to say Yosuke was rather angry once he saw Teddie already snoring on the futon.

"What do you think you're doing?" Yosuke remarked with annoyance. Teddie didn't so much budge. He was still completely awake, and while he wanted to tell ghost stories and all that other stuff they did at sleepovers now that Maya was here, he also knew being awake meant Yosuke would kick his ass if he didn't move. So he simply pretended to snore and kept as still as possible. "Wake up!" Yosuke shouted at Teddie, though even when he kicked the loafing bear, he simply rolled back into position, being sure to snore just a little louder. Yosuke threw his hands up into the air with anger. "Well that's just fantastic."

"What's wrong?" Maya questioned with great curiosity as Yosuke threw a fit. She didn't quite realize the repercussions of Teddie stealing the futon tonight. He shook his head and sighed, folding his arms and continuing to glare at the back of Teddie's head. He was going to defluff that bear once he woke up, he swore to god.

"...I'm out of futons." He spat with disgust at Teddie, partially sensing Teddie was completely conscience and deriving some kind of pleasure out of this. Yosuke threw his hands in the air again with anger before pacing around, trying to find something

that perhaps he could sleep in. Worse come to worse, he'd just sleep on the floor. He could put up with his back aching for one night of the year. Maya made that 'oh' motion with her lips, facing her eyes away from Yosuke and blushing. Seemed pretty obvious to her how this was going to end. And why was that? Because Yosuke wasn't going to let her sleep anywhere other than the bed, nor was Maya going to let him sleep on the floor in his own house. They could wage war over this for hours, neither would be shaken on the matter.

"W-Well we can just make a barrier with some pillows right?" Maya interrupted his pacing, cheeks still red hot. Yosuke paused, rubbing at his chin a bit. That actually wasn't a terrible idea; he certainly had some spare pillows lying around that he could use to make a barrier down the middle. After a moment he simply shrugged. Not the ideal solution, but it worked.

"Alright then, I'll go get the pillows." Yosuke remarked before heading out the door to his room and to the closet to grab some more pillows. Maya simply sighed before taking a seat on Yosuke's bed, eventually curling her legs up and resting her head against one of the pillows that was already there. At the risk of sounding kind of creepy, it kind of had his scent on it. I guess that's what happens when you sweat a lot in your sleep. She batted her eyelids a bit, almost ready to fall asleep, but then Yosuke came back in with the pillows. "Well I see you've already made yourself comfortable." Yosuke joked as he walked in with their improv barricade. Maya would have moved to help him make the wall between them, but in the end, she was just so damn tired. Not even physically, but emotionally. She was in the same bed as Yosuke for fuck's sake, and yet she still didn't have the slightest idea how he felt about her, if at all. It was like it was right in her face, and yet no matter how much she tried to reach for it, she just couldn't grab ahold of it. It only took a moment before Yosuke finished the barricade and jumped on the other side of the bed, making a big thump in the process. "This alright? I can put some more pillows if you want."

"No, that's fine, but..." Maya paused, her mouth seeming to get drier as she laid there trying to think of what to say. Honest to god if Phillip hadn't said anything, she would perfectly content just laying here. But he did, and now it was all she could think about. Everyone around her seemed to be able to see it, but Yosuke remained completely blind to all of this. She... She had to say something. She had been so content just waiting for him to say something, but she couldn't take it anymore. It was driving her nuts. *"Yosuke... can I ask you something?"*

"Hmm? Yeah, sure." Yosuke questioned with slight confusion, turning on his side of the mattress so that he was facing her. Maya paused again trying to decide how to ease into this. She couldn't just say it, right? Clearly Yosuke was not one for the thought of those two being a thing, and that should have been a deterrent to Maya's whole idea of asking Yosuke whether he liked her or not, but she was determined. She'd have an answer and she'd have it right now. She couldn't take

the suspense any more than she already had. It was bad enough she waited years for Justin and it turned out he didn't even like her like that; she wouldn't make the same mistake twice.

"Well... What do you think of me?"

"What do you mean?" Yosuke questioned. He wasn't sure what was bringing this up out of the blue. They were friends, so obviously he liked her. Was she asking what specifically he liked about her? Because he couldn't really delve into that without looking like a complete creep. Why did he like her? Because, she was one of the nicest girls he had ever met, not to mention she was drop dead gorgeous. But it wasn't about the looks of course, the looks only made his heart fluctuate a little when he laid eyes on her; it was the fact that no matter what was happening, she always stayed positive. She was strong, but not overly serious about everything either. And she had compassion; for everyone and everything, even the people who had wronged her. At the end of the day, she was the model of human perfection. He could only wish to be more like the person Maya was.

"Well, uh... how do I put it..." Maya mouthed to herself a bit. She knew Yosuke couldn't read lips, but it wasn't like she was going to sign off what she wanted to say until she knew exactly what words she was going to use. *"Well I guess, uh... Well we're friends, I know that, but I mean what specifically do you... no that's not it... Uh... I think you're great Yosuke, like, really great, and I was wondering if... not that's not it either... What I guess I'm trying to say is..."*

"Maya, you're rambling." Yosuke interrupted after a while. It was hard for him to answer a question when Maya didn't even seem to know what the question was in the first place.

"I know, dammit! Give me a second." Maya sighed, clenching her trembling bottom lip between her teeth. She was no good at this. Wasn't it usually the guy's job to ask the girl, not the other way around? Maybe that was the reason she never found a boyfriend of her own; she couldn't take initiative. She just didn't know how you eased in to a confession like this... Maybe it wasn't so much as easing into it as it was just doing it. Like jumping into a pool of cold water. If you did it little by little, it was agonizing. But if you jumped in, the discomfort of the freezing water faded away almost instantaneously. *"Yosuke, I... I... I... I can't do this."* Maya eventually flipped over. *Goddammit girl, get a hold of yourself. This is your problem; you gotta say it to his face...* Or maybe... maybe it was more of a case of show, don't tell. Justin never was exactly her go to guy for relationship advice though, so she wasn't sure how well that would work.

"Maya...?" Yosuke whispered as she flung herself to face away from him, trembling slightly with disappointment in herself and her inability to get it out of her mouth. She was talking about them being friends, but then she started to panick, which confused Yosuke to no end... At least at first... But he had a tentative theory. It

wasn't something he could prove, but there was only one way to find out. He just hoped to god he wasn't wrong and made an ass out of himself. If this couldn't be more, he'd like to keep their friendship intact. He tapped her on the shoulder, trying to get her to turn around. It took some coaxing, though she eventually turned about to face Yosuke, a look of discontent on her face all the while. That immediately shifted to one of great shock and anxiety though as he reached out to place his hand on her cheek. "I think you're great too. Like really great." He grinned a bit as he teased her. She was simply caught off guard for a moment, not sure how to react. She didn't believe it at first, but once it really started to seep in that he meant that, well, her heart practically exploded in pure ecstasy.

"Y-You mean... You mean great like great, or great like 'great'?" Maya questioned, her pupils staring intently into Yosuke's. She wasn't signing off anymore though; she didn't want to. She just wanted to talk to him with her own two lips even though she knew she couldn't. Yosuke simply chuckled to himself.

"You know I can't read lips." He joked, leaning slightly closer. "But you know... I'd like to learn." Maya smile, bottom lip trembling for a moment. Did he... He totally did. He totally did just ask Maya to teach him to 'read lips.' This was all so... sudden. She had been so scared of telling Yosuke how she felt, then here he was not even two seconds later trying to snatch a kiss... How long exactly had he felt like this? And when in god's name did he plan on telling her? Did he understand how much pain she had been in trying to live with her little crush all this time? He was such an asshole. But... he was an asshole she adored with all her heart. She'd have him no other way. She didn't so much as hesitate to oblige his request, delicately pressing her lips against his. It was only a short peck, maybe two seconds in length, but it was enough to get the message across... She loved him, and as far as she could tell, he loved her. And for just a moment, the two froze in place, as if their hearts had stopped and their body along with it.

"I love you, Yosuke."

"Merry Christmas, Maya."

The barricade didn't last very long that night, if only because they had their arms wrapped around each other the entire time, foreheads pressed against each other in bliss.

MUSIC

The Flaming Lips – Yoshima Battles the Pink Robots Pt. 1

Faith No More – Midlife Crisis